

FOOD TRAY LINER

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application claims priority to U.S. Provisional Application Serial No. 60/478,021, filed June 12, 2003 and entitled FOOD TRAY LINER, the disclosure of which is hereby incorporated herein by reference.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The present application relates to a liner for a tray and, more particularly, to a food tray liner.

Over the years and, especially more recently, fast food has expanded to include healthier foods, such as salads, including taco salads, pasta dishes, or like, which do not lend themselves to being wrapped in paper or foil wraps, which have been historically used to wrap more conventional fast foods, such as hamburgers, sandwiches or the like. Instead, these newer fast food groups are delivered or served on trays or in containers. Furthermore, like the hamburgers, salads, pasta dishes, are offered in a variety of different combinations of ingredients and toppings. However, unlike the paper or foil wraps, the food trays tend to look alike and do not identify the food being served, which can lead to incorrect orders being dispensed or being served, resulting in inefficiency and customer dissatisfaction.

In addition, many of these newer fast food groups have components, such as salad dressing, sour cream, sauce or the like, that tend to leak or drip, unless the food is adequately contained in a closed serving tray.

Accordingly, there is a need for a serving tray that can be used to serve food to, for example, fast food customers, and that will contain the liquid ingredients of the food in the tray. Furthermore, there is a need for a tray that may uniquely identify the food being served to increase efficiency of the food establishment and increase customer satisfaction.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention provides a food tray liner that is preformed to conform to the inner surfaces of a tray, and particularly to a tray with upstanding sidewalls, to provide

a food tray assembly that can hold and retain the food in the try, including the liquid ingredients, and, further, in a manner that can identify the food being serve in the tray.

Accordingly, the present invention provides a food tray assembly that includes a tray and a preformed flexible liner. The tray has a base wall and sidewalls extending up from the base wall to form a cavity therein. The preformed flexible liner is configured and arranged to substantially conform to the inner surfaces of the base wall and sidewalls to form a liquid containing bowl in the cavity for holding food and liquid therein.

In one aspect, the sidewalls of the tray form a contiguous perimeter wall.

In other aspects, the liner comprises a preformed flexible paper liner, including a preformed flexible paperboard liner.

In other aspects, the base wall of the tray may comprise a circular wall or a rectangular wall.

According to other aspect, the liner may include indicia. For example, the indicia may be formed in the liner or on the liner. Preferably, the indicia are printed on the liner. For example, the indicia may be used to identify the food or a characteristic of the being served on the tray or may bear the trademark of the establishment serving the food or the indicia may be arbitrary, such as a design.

In another form of the invention, a food tray assembly includes a tray and a flexible liner, with the flexible liner having a base wall and upstanding sidewalls. The base wall of the liners substantially conforms to the base wall of the tray. Similarly, the sidewalls of the liner substantially conform to the sidewalls of the tray. The sidewalls of the liner form a contiguous perimeter wall, which forms a liquid containing bowl in the cavity of the tray for holding and containing food and liquid therein.

In one aspect, the sidewalls of the tray form a contiguous perimeter wall.

According to yet another aspect, a food tray liner for a tray includes a preformed flexible liner. The preformed flexible liner has a base wall and an upstanding perimeter wall extending around and upwardly from the base wall. The perimeter wall is contiguous with the base wall and forms a continuous wall around the base wall wherein the base wall and the upstanding perimeter wall define a liquid containing bowl when placed in the tray.

In one aspect, the liner includes indicia, for example indicia printed thereon, which may be used to identify the food of the food establishment.

Accordingly, it can be appreciated that the present invention provides a food tray assembly that is particularly suitable for serving food that contains a liquid ingredient, such as sauce, salad dressing or the like. In addition, the liner may provide a means for identifying the food contained therein, by way of indicia that can be formed in or printed on the liner.

These and other objects, advantages, purposes, and features of the invention will become more apparent from the study of the following description taken in conjunction with the drawings.

#### DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is an exploded perspective view of a food tray liner and tray of the present invention;

FIG. 2 is a perspective view of the food tray liner inserted into the tray;

FIG. 3 is a perspective view of the tray of FIGS. 1 and 2;

FIG. 4 is a top plan view of the tray of FIG. 3;

FIG. 5 is a side elevation view of the tray of FIG. 4;

FIG. 6 is a bottom plan view of the tray of FIG. 3;

FIG. 7 is a second side elevation view of the tray of FIG. 6;

FIG. 8 is a perspective view of the tray liner of FIGS. 1 and 2;

FIG. 9 is a top plan view of the tray liner of FIG. 8; and

FIG. 10 is a side elevation view of the tray liner of FIGS. 8 and 9.

#### DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

The numeral 10 generally designates a tray liner of the present invention, which is adapted for insertion into a tray 12. Tray liner 10 is preferably formed from a highly flexible material and, more preferably, from a highly flexible paper or thin paper board. Furthermore, as will be more fully described below, tray liner 10 is a preformed liner that conforms to the inner surfaces of tray 12 and, further, is configured and arranged to form a liquid containing bowl 14 wherein food both in a solid form and a liquid form may be contained in the bowl 14 when liner 10 is placed in tray 12.

Referring to FIGS. 3-5, tray 12 includes a base wall 16 and sidewalls 18, 19, 20, and 21. Sidewalls 18, 19, 20, and 21 are interconnected at their respective ends or corners to form a continuous perimeter wall 22 that extends around and upwardly from base wall 16

to thereby form a cavity 24. In the illustrated the corners of the respective sidewalls are rounded; however, it should be understood that, alternately, the corners may be squared-off or faceted. In addition, perimeter wall 22 is preferably contiguous with base wall 16 so as to form a closed wall around the full perimeter of base wall 16.

Optionally, perimeter wall 22 may have a rolled upper edge 26, which forms a lip, for both decorative and functional purposes. As would be understood, rolled edge 26 provides a gripping surface for holding tray 12 and also provides added stiffness to the respective sidewalls.

As best seen in FIG. 5, sidewalls 18, 19, 20, and 21 of tray 12 are angled with respect to base wall 16 and optionally are angled at an obtuse angle relative to the base wall to form sloping sides; however, it can be appreciated that sidewalls 18, 19, 20, and 21 may be substantially orthogonal to the base wall. Tray 12 may be formed from a variety of different materials, including a plastic material, and may be formed by molding, including by injection molding.

Referring to FIGS. 6 and 7, base wall 16 of tray 12 has a generally planar solid bottom surface 16a; though it should be understood that tray 12 may have incorporated into bottom surface 16a bumps, ridges, or the like, and, further, may be foraminous (formed with a plurality of perforations).

As noted above, liner 10 is preformed into its configuration so that it assumes the configuration illustrated in FIG. 8, prior to be inserted into tray 12. Referring to FIG. 8, insert liner 10 includes a base wall 30 and upwardly extending sidewalls 32, 33, 34, and 35, which together with base wall 30 form liquid containing bowl 14. As noted above, liner 10 preferably comprises a flexible liner and is preferably formed from paper or thin paperboard. Preferably, perimeter wall 36 is contiguous with base wall 30 and, further, is continuous around the perimeter of base wall 30 so that liquid may be contained therein. In addition, liner 10 is preferably formed by molding, such as press molding or the like in which a sheet of paper or paperboard, for example, is conformed into the desired shape prior to insertion into tray 12. Therefore, liner 10 comprises a preformed flexible liner that includes upstanding sidewalls prior to insertion into tray 12.

Furthermore, base wall 30 and sidewalls 32, 33, 34, and 35 are configured and arranged to substantially conform to the inner surfaces of the respective base and sidewalls of tray 12. Though illustrated in rectangular shapes, it should be understood that both liner 10 and tray 12 may have circular shapes with circular-shaped base walls. Furthermore,

sidewalls 32, 33, 34, and 35 of liner 10 preferably are angled at a similar angle to sidewalls 18, 19, 20, and 21 of tray 12 so that when liner 10 is placed in cavity 24 of tray 12, liner 10 will substantially conform to the inner surfaces of tray 12.

When forming liner 10, indicia, such as trademarks, pictures, or descriptions or symbols identifying the food or the like, may be provided on or in liner 10. For example, indicia may be printed or laminated onto the liner or the indicia may be formed therein for example, by impregnating the liner with a die or bleach to form the indicia. In addition, the liner may be coated to provide a decorative finish. For example, the indicia may optionally be visible only when placed in the tray. Optionally, when forming liner 10, liner 10 may be formed in stacks, with each successive insert being provided with different indicia.

While several forms of the invention have been shown, it can be appreciated that further modifications may be made. Therefore, it will be understood that the embodiments shown in the drawings and described above are merely for illustrative purposes, and are not intended to limit the scope of the invention which is defined by the claims which follow as interpreted under the principles of patent law including the doctrine of equivalents.